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ABSTRACT

The role of community colleges (including technical and junior colleges) and the transfer of students to 4-year institutions are discussed. This issue presents three articles. The first article, "Democracy's Colleges," suggests that community colleges are the most successful institutional innovation in 20th century American higher education. In 1989, community colleges served about 43% of all students in higher education, many of whom might not be eligible for typical 4-year institutions. For many students, community colleges are an avenue to 4-year colleges. The second article, "The Ford Foundation--ETS Transfer Project," describes an Educational Testing Service (ETS) program supported by the Ford Foundation to monitor the transfers of students from five community colleges into four-year institutions. The diversity of the colleges and the transient nature of their student bodies made research difficult, and it is concluded that more information is necessary to help colleges assist students in transferring. The third article, "Four Transfer Projects," summarizes the research reports for four of the five colleges in the ETS-Ford Foundation study: (1) Houston Community College; (2) Los Angeles Mission College; (3) San Diego City College; and (4) Lawson State Community College. Four graphs are included. (SLD)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND TRANSFER
ETS Policy Notes, V3, #1, Winter 1990

Richard J. Coley, Editor
ETS Policy Information Center

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ETS POLICY NOTES

News from the ETS Policy Information Center

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Democracy's Colleges

If there is one American institution that tries to be all things to all people, the most likely candidate is the community college.* Community colleges are, without a doubt, the most successful institutional innovation in 20th century American higher education. With good reason, they are called by some, "democracy's colleges." Since the first junior college opened its doors in Joliet, Illinois in 1901, the number of two-year institutions has grown to over 1,200, representing a large and important sector of higher education.

Exploding Enrollment

Community colleges serve an impressive number of students. The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) estimates that in 1989 community colleges enrolled about 5.7 million students, or about 43 percent of all students in higher education. Since the early 1960s, community

(continued on page 6)

*Community college is the term that will be used to describe community, technical, and junior colleges. As defined by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC), community colleges are regionally accredited postsecondary institutions at which the associate degree is the highest credential awarded.

The Ford Foundation - ETS Transfer Project

Since 1986, Educational Testing Service has received support from the Ford Foundation to help five community colleges design and carry out projects to monitor their students' transitions to four-year colleges. The foundation identified the colleges for two reasons. It judged them to be, first, capable of increasing the number of their students who transfer, and second, in need of assistance in data collection and analysis.

The five colleges adopted very different approaches to addressing the transfer problem, ranging from collecting a series of case studies of individuals to creating a longitudinal survey with a number of different follow-up activities. (Summaries for four of the five projects are provided in this issue of *ETS Policy Notes*.) In both 1988 and 1989 the colleges met at ETS to share their progress and partial results with each other and with the ETS research staff.

In the summer of 1990, four of these five colleges presented the final reports of their work during a conference at ETS. Their reports are enlightening in their review of the methods the colleges devised to collect data about their students and the methods they used to define the transfer process.

Several findings emerged. First, although most of these colleges had staff members who knew how to do research, few of these individuals had specific institutional research responsibilities. The problem was mainly a lack of resources, such as computers, staff time, and money to carry out the work. At Lawson State Community College, for example, one staff member using one mainframe computer had to handle everything from payrolls to student records, leaving little time and money available for research.

Second, implementing systems to routinely monitor student progress within two-year colleges was neither easy nor inexpensive. As Patricia Davis' research at Houston Community College has shown, student enrollment patterns vary considerably, and it is very difficult, even with multiple follow-ups by mail and by phone, to obtain information about stu-

(continued on page 2)

This Issue: Community Colleges and Transfer

- Democracy's Colleges
- The Ford Foundation-ETS Transfer Project
- Four Transfer Projects

TM015994

dents who are not currently enrolled.

Third, it was even more difficult for community colleges to monitor students' progress after they have transferred to four-year colleges. Even when this information is sent back to the community colleges by the four-year colleges, few community colleges have the staff time and financial resources to analyze it.

Finally, while community colleges are concerned about transfer, there are other areas competing for their attention. For example, several of the colleges in this project were highly concerned with student retention. Most of the community colleges in this project felt that if their time and resources were limited to one effort, it should be retention, since funds derived from student enrollments pay for much of what takes place at these institutions.

Based on these projects and the ETS conference, project staff offer some conclusions regarding transfer issues.

- Community colleges are, in general, so diverse that no single methodology for monitoring student transitions can serve each well. While large institutions, such as Houston, must follow students through mail and telephone contacts, along with computer records, the college still had disappointing rates of continuing contact. Smaller colleges have found that counseling offices provide fairly effective monitoring.

- Because community college students are so transient, it is difficult, if not impossible, to conduct longitudinal research, especially in large institutions where contact between staff members and students is limited. Patricia Davis found transfer-oriented students returning to Houston Community College after periods as long as nine semesters of non-enrollment.

- Given the present limited resources of many community colleges, it is unrealistic to expect them to monitor and analyze student transitions. However, more monitoring might occur if community colleges understood the value of the information that can be obtained. The larger community colleges, especially those that are part of larger districts and those that have articulation agreements with four-year institutions, have better opportunities to monitor students and conduct research than smaller institutions. District-wide collaborative research projects may be more useful than those done at a single institution. Small institutions might benefit from instruction on performing small projects, such as case studies, that they could manage more easily. More resources targeted to such efforts, of course, would make monitoring more feasible.

- Many community college students do not understand the nature of the education programs available and how they differ from those offered in four-year colleges. Nor do many understand what is involved in transferring and earning a bachelor's degree. Many students entering community colleges, especially minority students and those from low-income families, are the first in their family to enroll in postsecondary education. A lack of pre-college counseling may also account for some of the problem.* Transfer-oriented students also say they choose two-year colleges rather than four-year colleges because they have received inadequate preparation for college and because two-year colleges cost less.

- Finally, community colleges need more information to determine how they can facilitate their students' transfer to four-year colleges. Research that emphasizes demographics, showing only, for instance, that White and more affluent students are more likely to transfer, does not provide the information these colleges need. Although community colleges must pay attention to student transitions, they also need both national and institutional studies that analyze the effectiveness of specific community college programs. Monitoring, by itself, will not provide the answers they need.

* ETS researchers Ruth Ekstrom and Valerie Lee found in previous research that high school seniors who indicated that they planned to enroll in a two-year college after high school, as compared to those bound for four-year colleges, were more likely to have been in the general than the academic curriculum in high school and were less likely to have received either counseling about what courses to take in high school or counseling about entering postsecondary education.

"We march to the beat of a very different drum. We discarded the usual mechanisms upon which institutional credibility is built. The profile of our entering classes would not be the hallmark of our achievement. Our doors would be open to all with the implicit promise that we would repair the deficiencies of the past and erect a new edifice upon which the future could be built."

Flora Mancuso Edwards
President, Middlesex Community College, N.J.
Speaking at Educational Testing Service, June 1990.

Four Transfer Projects

As explained in the article, "The Ford Foundation - ETS Transfer Project," ETS worked with five community colleges from 1986 to 1990 to assist them in the research/data gathering component of their efforts to increase transfer rates to four-year institutions. *Policy Notes* has summarized below the final project reports for the four colleges that made presentations at the June 1990 conference held at ETS. We hope these experiences will be useful to institutions facing similar problems. For further information, contact the project director, whose name is provided at the end of each summary.

Houston Community College System

In the fall of 1987, the Houston Community College System (HCCS) surveyed 1,367 students who entered the institution the preceding fall and who said they intended to transfer. To study the persistence of these students, they were surveyed again a year later, and followed for a total of nine semesters.

Attendance Patterns. The most dramatic loss in students occurred after the first semester; only 55 percent returned. There were steady decreases each semester, so that by summer 1989 only 11 percent of the sample was enrolled. Only 1 percent of the students attended all nine possible semesters. The majority, 53 percent, attended only one or two terms. A pattern of "traditional" attendance (attending two years, fall and spring terms) was shown by only 21 of the 1,367 students.

Transfer. Within two years, 22 percent of the transfer-intent students transferred to senior institutions. Of these, 13 percent transferred after one semester, and 41 percent after two. These data conflict with the traditional perception of the transfer student as one who attends for two years and accumulates 60 hours of credit.

Students' transfer intentions were remarkably stable. Around 80 percent of the students reported in the follow-up survey that they still intended to transfer. Those who remained intent on transfer were more likely to be "traditional" students (younger, lower income, single); students who reported that an important reason for attending the community college was to prepare for a four-year institution; students who indicated that they enjoyed academic success; and those who were encouraged by faculty members and were adequately prepared to transfer. First term grade point average (GPA) was somewhat related. Eighty-three percent of those with a 2.0 average or better retained college plans, compared to 70 percent of those with a GPA under 2.0.

Persistence. First term GPA was a strong predictor of persistence. While only slightly more than half of those with a GPA less than 2.0 spent another semester at HCCS, nearly 90 percent of students with a 2.0 or more returned to the college for more coursework. Younger respondents were more likely to continue coursework, as were respondents who said that preparation to attend a four-year school was important.

Some Conclusions. The most important finding is that the factors that best determine a student's ultimate success in transferring are not uncontrollable factors like race/ethnicity and parent education, but rather academic experiences in the first semester of college. While many of the factors that impact on GPA are beyond the control of the college, the project results emphasized the importance of taking steps to insure student success.

Less than one-third of the transfer-intent students indicated an interest in an HCCS degree. A fairly large number of students who transferred periodically took courses at HCCS. Students who, under traditional definitions, would be considered dropouts, returned to the institution two and three years later.

Another conclusion, therefore, is that merely examining enrollment patterns over short periods of time is not sufficient for retention and persistence studies among community college students. Finally, the study concluded that the feasibility of conducting longitudinal follow-up survey research on community college students, at least in a large urban setting, is practically nil. Despite intensive follow-up both by phone and mail, response rates were poor, especially among students not currently enrolled. Several efforts are under way in Texas, however, to address one aspect of this problem. Senior institutions are beginning to send transcripts of transfers back to the community colleges and the state is exploring ways to improve the data transmission system to help community colleges deal with the issue of transfer.

For more information, write to Dr. Patricia C. Davis, PO Box 7849, Houston Community College System, Houston, TX 77270-7849.

Los Angeles Mission College

Los Angeles Mission College is one of the nine campuses in the Los Angeles Community College District. This study was a first attempt to determine the number of students, particularly Black and Hispanic, who actually go on to a four-year college and to examine those variables that assist or inhibit transfer.

The entering class of 1987-88 was followed from fall 1987 to the end of fall 1988, for three semesters. During that time, three-fourths left the college. At entrance, only 7 percent of the students indicated an intent to transfer, 25 percent intended to get an associate's degree, and 68 percent were undecided. Students with undeclared goals were found more likely to drop out than other students.

To help identify the reasons for poor retention rates, a survey was administered to all 186 students who said they intended to transfer. The most significant finding was that only 18 percent made use of academic counseling, while two-thirds either didn't use it or didn't know it was available. Most important, nearly seven in 10 students never talked to a counselor. The effects are clear — while 65 percent of the students said that they did not need remedial English instruction and 73 percent said they did not need remedial math, only four out of 85 students passed English I and only two out of 96 passed the college transfer math course.

In spring of 1988, the researchers contacted 54 dropouts of the original group of 186 students who said they intended to transfer. Forty-four percent had returned to work, 6 percent had transferred to another school, and 11 percent mentioned personal or physical problems that prevented them from continuing their education. One-fifth said they planned to return to the community college for the next semester, another fifth planned to return within a year, and 16 percent were not sure whether or not they would return to college.

As part of the Master Matriculation Plan mandated by California, the LA Community College District is purchasing a computer package to monitor and track students throughout the state. This system will allow the college to measure student progress, identify at-risk students, and provide for better academic and career advisement services.

For more information, write to Mr. Anthony Guarino, Los Angeles Mission College, 1212 San Fernando Road, San Fernando, CA 91340.

San Diego City College

San Diego City College is an urban community college with 12,000 students. More than half of the incoming freshmen each year require at least one semester of remedial math and English in order to qualify for intermediate algebra or freshman composition. Dropout rates are high among all minority students, including those who are adequately prepared for college.

It was feared that new efforts to strengthen the associate degree and to improve the transfer program at City College might increase the dropout rate unless extraordinary measures were adopted, including support services and a special curriculum for underprepared students.

In June of 1988, the college's Board of Trustees approved funding for a "Student Retention Project" designed to develop models for faculty-student mentoring, an interdisciplinary curriculum, and a college-wide tutorial program. The major goal is to enable more students to transfer successfully to four-year institutions. An additional objective is to establish baseline data on minority student retention rates and transfer planning. The project has three components — the ACHIEVE mentoring program, the interdisciplinary Cluster program, and the Tutorial program.

The ACHIEVE Program. Committed faculty are selected as mentors and role models for incoming minority students enrolled in a one-unit personal growth seminar designed to help students succeed in college. This seminar provides instruction in college survival skills, study skills, and educational planning; in addition, motivational speakers address such topics as memory training, test anxiety, and learning styles.

The Cluster Program. Students needing developmental English courses and interested in earning a certificate or a degree are provided with instruction in reading, writing, and study skills along with instruction in the social sciences and other general education areas. These students are "clustered" together in a 12-unit block of classes and participate in small group study sessions. Social and cultural activities provide additional opportunities to strengthen peer relationships and students' ties to the college.

The Tutorial Program. This program involves free peer tutoring in introductory, transfer-level courses in all college departments. The program is intended to strengthen

the academic preparation of the students and the confidence and preparedness of the tutors, some of whom had already transferred to four-year institutions and were viewed as successes by the students. The program is one of the largest and most comprehensive in California.

Baseline Survey Results. Students in the three programs and a random sample of other students were surveyed to establish baseline demographic data and information about attitudes related to academic success. Initial findings suggest that the college must work more directly with the family unit in recruitment and retention efforts. Since college may tend to alienate some students from their families and friends, it may be important to develop an educational program for families as part of the retention and follow-up efforts.

Students in the ACHIEVE, Cluster, and the control groups rated success in school and transfer to a four-year school as very important. The most frequent reason these students gave for enrollment at City College was to prepare to transfer. Students reported that they were getting sufficient help from their instructors, that they were satisfied with their teachers and classes, and that teachers had the greatest impact on them. ACHIEVE respondents indicated that the program's most important aspect was the mentoring process. Cluster students saw the quality of the instructional program and the interest and caring attitude of the faculty as the most important benefits. The re-enrollment rate from the fall to spring semester was around 80 percent for all groups, including students in the random sample. Since the students chosen for the programs were more likely to be at risk of dropping out than the average students, their re-enrollment rates can be considered better than would be expected.

For more information, write to Mr. Curt McCarty, San Diego City College, 1313 12th Ave., San Diego, CA 92101.

Lawson State Community College

Lawson State Community College is located in a predominantly Black area of Birmingham, Alabama. Ninety percent of its students receive financial aid and 90 percent need developmental skills courses. While somewhere near half of Lawson's students desire to transfer, few do; even fewer of those who transfer complete coursework at a four-year college. During the last four years the institution has established transfer programs and articulation agreements. In order to identify, assist, and follow the progress of students who transfer or plan to transfer to four-year institutions, Lawson monitored a group of students from fall 1987 to spring 1990 to identify factors that facilitated or limited transfer.

A computerized early warning system was used to flag students who were: academically weak or taking courses part-time; adding or dropping courses frequently; and "stop-outs" for a quarter. The college then contacted the "flagged" students to identify the problem and offer assistance.

Of the students intending to transfer, 50 were selected to participate in the monitoring program; 25 responded. Ten more were added later. Of this group of 35, 21 transferred to four-year institutions.

Several factors identified as significant in establishing a successful tracking system were:

- accessibility of student information from the mainframe computer database so that counselors could monitor student progress;
- development of a clearly defined educational plan for each student planning to transfer;
- contacts with the counseling department, which were found to be the most effective way to track students. Most students required a minimum of three to four years to complete the transfer program. Many students who are initially not interested in transfer decide to do so after completing several quarters and realizing their academic potential.

The project staff concluded that older transfer-oriented students may need extra attention to help them achieve their goal, especially if they have dependents and are working while attending college.

For more information, write to Dr. Charlsie Cook, Lawson State Community College, 3060 Wilson Road, Birmingham, AL 35221.

Democracy's . . .
(continued from page 1)

college enrollments have grown much faster than enrollments in four-year institutions (see Figure 1).

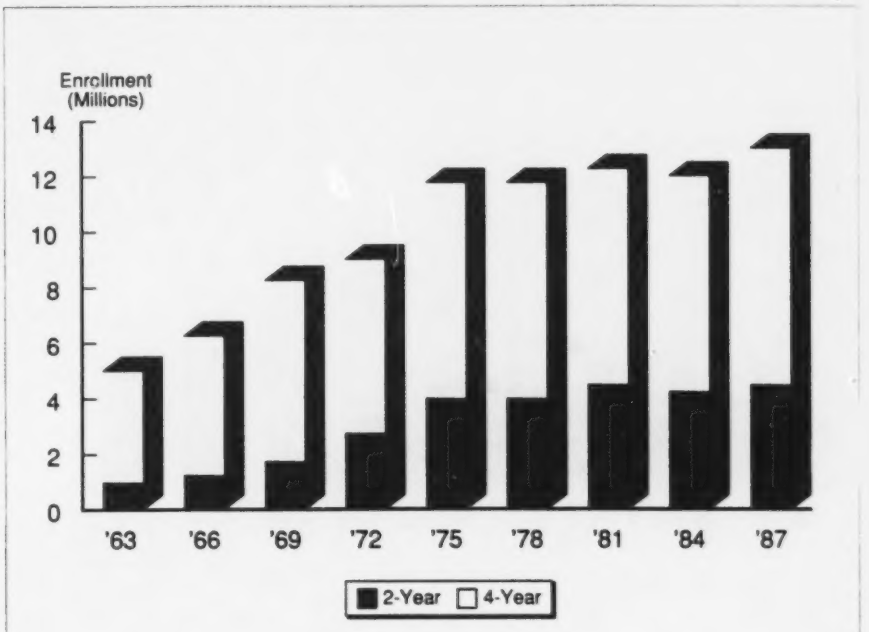
Who are these community college students? More than half are 25 years old or older; the average age is 28. In 1970, women accounted for 40 percent of these students; in 1989 their representation had increased to 55 percent. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of associate degrees awarded to women increased by 49 percent, compared to an increase of only 6 percent for men.

Increases in minority enrollment have also contributed significantly to community college growth. Students from minority groups are more likely than White students to attend community colleges. As shown in Figure 2, minority students comprise 22 percent of community college enrollment. The comparable figure for minority enrollment in four-year institutions is 15 percent. As a result of this disparity, nearly six out of ten Hispanic and American Indian students, and more than four in ten Black students attending all colleges, were enrolled in community colleges. The comparable figure for White students was 36 percent (see Figure 3).

On average, community college students have lower socioeconomic backgrounds than students in four-year institutions and are less likely to aspire to baccalaureate degrees. Data from the "High School and Beyond" study, for example, show that 59 percent of high school seniors who plan to earn a bachelor's degree enroll in four-year colleges immediately after graduation, while only 16 percent enroll in public community colleges as a route to a four-year degree. Many community college students eventually do earn baccalaureate degrees, but not in four years; many take eight to 10 years to earn the degree.

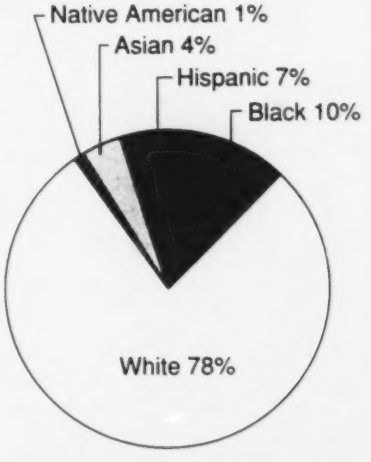
While community colleges do enroll talented students, their doors are open to students who might not typically be admitted to four-year institutions. Only 9 percent of the high school seniors with an "A" average attend community colleges in the first year after graduation; in contrast, 71 percent of the "A" students attend public or private four-year colleges. Community colleges also enroll 11 percent of the high school seniors with a "D" average, while four-year colleges enroll less than 1 percent of these students.

Figure 1
Enrollment Trends in Two- and Four-Year Institutions, 1963-1987



Source: "Digest of Education Statistics, 1989," National Center for Education Statistics, p. 168.

Figure 2
Distribution of Community College Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 1986



Source: "A Summary of Selected National Data Pertaining to Community, Technical, and Junior Colleges, June, 1990," American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, p. 11.C.2.

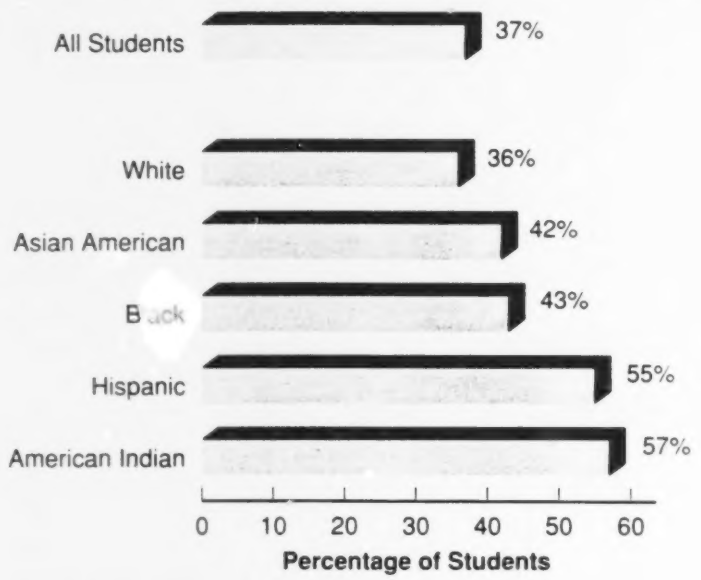
A Diversity of Objectives and Services

The rapid growth of community colleges is the direct result of their efforts to offer programs that serve students with diverse educational objectives. At first it was the ambition of the "junior college" to provide the first two years of a four-year college education or an alternative terminal degree. Over the years, however, there has been a concerted effort to broaden the mission of two-year colleges to make them responsive to the needs of the community.

They now provide occupational preparation for students earning the associate degree or a certificate as well as developmental education and high school certificates (GEDs) for high school dropouts. Many adults seek training to upgrade their work skills or pursue new careers. Also, today more than 75 percent of community colleges provide local industries and businesses with customized training, often as part of state economic development programs.

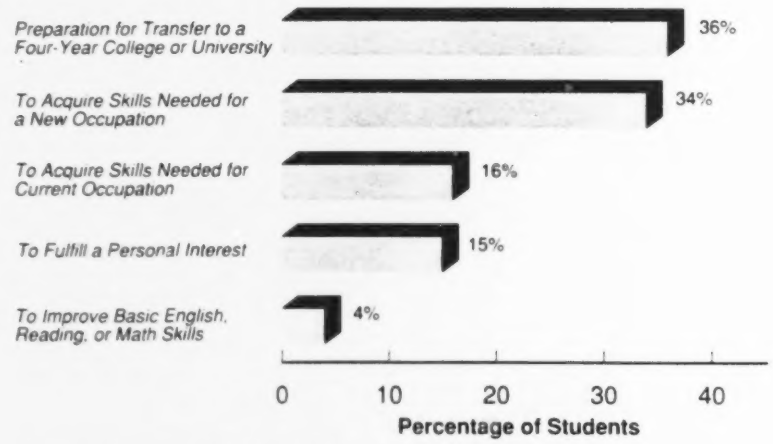
Student responses to a national survey conducted for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching confirm this diversity. Figure 4 shows students' primary reason for enrolling in a community college. As might be expected, results varied by age and curriculum. Most of the younger students listed "preparation for transfer" as a primary objective (56 percent), compared to only 16 percent of the students age 33 or older. Half of the liberal arts students said they enrolled for transfer, compared to only about a quarter of students in applied courses like business, allied health, or secretarial science.

Figure 3
Percentage of Students in Institutions of Higher Education That Are Enrolled in Two-Year Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, 1986



Source: "Digest of Educational Statistics, 1989." National Center for Education Statistics. Calculated from Table 175, p. 193.

Figure 4
Community College Students' Primary Reason for Enrolling in a Community College



Source: "A Summary of Selected National Data Pertaining to Community, Technical, and Junior Colleges, June, 1990." American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, p. 11.C.2.

The Transfer Issue

For many students, community colleges are their only avenue for participation in higher education. It is thus somewhat ironic that community colleges seem to be criticized because they enroll a larger proportion of minority students than do four-year colleges, and because large proportions of these minority students do not go on to pursue the baccalaureate degree. While the community college system should be applauded for providing educational opportunities to disadvantaged students, efforts to move these students into four-year institutions need to be intensified. For this reason, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) has declared 1991 as the "Year of the Transfer."

There could be dangers, however, in going too far in overemphasizing transfer rates if this leads colleges to restrict admissions in order to meet a test of accountability. It is, nevertheless, the promise inherent in the community college that all programs lead *somewhere*. Achieving high transfer rates requires participation from above and below the community college —from the four-year colleges to reach out to prospective transfer students, and from the high schools to provide better counseling services to the prospective community college students.

With support from the Ford Foundation, staff of Educational Testing Service have been working with five community colleges on the transfer issue. A conference held at ETS in June 1990 examined their experience in depth. The results from four of these projects (staff members from the fifth were unable to attend) are described in this issue of *Policy Notes*.

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